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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

Tradition and Art in furniture today.
-with particular reference to Richard Snyder.

A thesis submitted in candidacy for the degree,
to the faculty of History of Art and Design,
by Kathleen Boyle,
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INTRODUCTION:

After almost 100 years of technological advances in machine production and celebration of mass production of furniture, the furniture makers of the 1980's have chosen to reject what it is symbolic of, in favour of a very traditional attitude to furniture. Rather than draw inspiration from what is often considered the most revolutionary time in the history of furniture - the twentieth century - and the machine aesthetic - they are seeing furniture in many ways, through the eyes of the pre-industrial craftsman. The industrial age, the way of life which went with it, its rationality, organisation and production techniques no longer seem exciting to craftsmen, as products have become dull, bland and purely functional.

Today's craftsmen such as Richard Snyder are rejecting the sheer functionality which dominates much of today's furniture and are instead drawing their inspirations and attitudes from the history of other cultures, where furniture is at once usable, symbolic and beautiful.

Before the machine age when the house became a living tool and the furniture in it merely pieces of equipment to fulfil utilitarian purposes, there was an ethic towards the past. Victorians, in the same way as artists of today do, looked to the past, rather than the future for a huge wealth of artistic information and values. In the same way as Victorian furniture makers, Richard Snyder creates furniture which draws its inspiration from mythology, animals, tribal cultures, exotic lands, dream images and historical events. This past represents stability to us and the artist of today, in a rejection of what has happened. To the Victorians it was a rejection to what everyone knew was inevitable. Bringing mythology, diverse cultures and magical tribal elements into the interior, whether decorative or conceptual, acts as a form of escape alongside its function as a status and wealth symbol in just the same way as today. In short, this type of furniture is as multi-functional as that of the pre-industrial age. Its functions and manifestations are in many ways similar, and although attitudes to craftsmanship may have differed, the emphasis is still on the craftsman using the tools available at hand, artistic ability and individual personality, in creating an object.

In opposition to the dehumanisation which furniture design suffered in the 20th century, artists like Richard Snyder are combining their knowledge of all stages of history, to produce some of the most artistically profound and highly imaginative furniture to be seen since the 1900's.

CHAPTER 1:

Function and utility:

(A): Modernist Thinking, then and now.
Acceptance and rejection.

When we look around today in our streets and our homes we see reminders everywhere of what is called the modern movement in design. It is evident that our purpose-built office blocks, our homes, and most of our twentieth century buildings are the result of a new way of life and of thinking.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, as social conditions began to change rapidly, new needs and demands became strong factors in the designing of homes and the furniture within them. So extreme, and often ugly were these changes, that in the 1970's and 1980's, there has been a strong rejection of them, as artists and designers everywhere have realised exactly where design has led. This new way of thinking embodied itself in the idea of a future Utopia, a new way of living, complete functionalism, organisation and simple minimalism, designed to cater for the masses, and a lifestyle of living and working in the most organised way possible.

Modernism was a complete rejection of traditional values in design. These same values, which are again becoming evident, are embodied in hand made, beautiful, symbolic yet functional objects. Artists no longer looked to the past for inspiration, or to the huge wealth of art history and information, and began to embrace the new need for quantity and the huge advances being made in all sorts of machine related areas. Technology, machinery and production techniques were its tools. Modernist thinking in Europe grounded itself firmly on a rejection of the symbolic, ornamental, and decorative qualities which had been so popular at the turn of the century. At this time there was another more serious need, this being the continuous existence of unsatisfactory housing for the rising working class and the crowding of cities which outmoded building and production techniques. Political reform and social re-ordering were powerful forces within the European climate of the time, and the need for complete social

reorganisation led to this rejection of past values, and the hope in the future.

The future, which was in store for the people of the 1920's and in which they had so much hope, is now our present. Their quest for the ideal future answered its problems through huge mass production industrial plants churning out pieces of equipment for the masses every day. In doing so, we today are suffering the consequences. Our faith in technology is beginning to falter as toxic waste kills our wildlife. Smog blankets all cities and chemicals are released daily into the atmosphere. People are now beginning to wonder whether we should pay this price. In the 1920's and 1930's perhaps it did fulfil a real need for quantity and a new idea for future stability, however, it has now proven itself to be a method of providing people with their greedy consumer commodities. It has developed and advanced to create huge amounts of environmental instability and is the reason for, in design terms, a complete reduction in aesthetic values of previously valuable objects, such as furniture, through mass production. Through this process, furniture became nothing more than utilitarian pieces of equipment and it lost its ability to be both functional and beautiful through the work of a human mind and creativity. It is for these reasons today that artists and craftspeople such as Richard Snyder are returning to the past and making decorative and conceptual hand made furniture.

(B): The Characteristics of Modern Furniture Today.

The furniture which we use today is a direct result of modernist thinking and the efforts which they made to improve everyone's lifestyle. Today, in furniture stores, can be found many of the considered revolutionary designs of Le Corbusier, Mies Van Der Rohe and Marcel Bruer, to name but a few of the most uncompromising modernists. Cassina, one of the leading modern furniture manufacturers in Italy, still produce and sell these modern classics to retailers worldwide. The grand confort chair (fig. 1) designed by french modernists, Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand, is one such design which throughout its history has always remained popular in terms of its comfort, practicality and compact design. Its leather covers proved practical in terms of hygiene and durability. Its form was and is in keeping with the organisation and functionality demanded of an exhausting lifestyle. Above all else, it is relatively cheap to produce.

Le Corbusier's revolutionary concept of exposing, rather than concealing, the framework of a deep upholstered armchair, made sofas and chairs easier, quicker and more economical to produce. Rather than use the traditional slow method of constructing and joining, the frame simply has to be constructed and the cushions fitted in. Furniture produced with such simplicity and ease, in terms of mass production, has proven to be economically viable and therefore termed as a classic design. But it is merely a piece of classic design - design for function, for comfort, for minimum fuss, typical of much of today's designing processes for maximum use.

Charlotte Perriand's attitude to furniture in the 1930's was one of many which has set the scene for much of today's thinking. In her view furniture suggested:

transparency, reds, blues. The brilliance of coloured paint. That chairs are for sitting on, that cupboards are for holding our belongings. Space, light, the joy of creating and living in this century of ours. Brightness, loyalty, liberty in thinking and acting.(1)



Figure (1); Le Gran Confort chair, Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand.
-1930's



Figure (2); A modern day fitted kitchen.

Richard Snyder and other furniture artists of the 1980's do not design furniture with these factors in mind. Rationalisation, utility, comfort and versatility do not often come into their creative process.

One furniture designer, Robert Wilhite from Los Angeles, is however, creating sleek, well finished pieces of furniture in which function is as important as sculptural and decorative elements. To view they are indeed highly functional. However, he combines sculpture and utility in concern for the sole idea of function which has come into furniture today. He consciously includes sculptural elements into functional objects. His design process involves his personal view of furniture, his concerns, and he uses the very accepted factor of function to show that other elements, sculptural and conceptual can also be present in a piece of furniture. Snyder however, makes cabinets, cupboards, tables and chairs in which function is not such an ultimate goal. The fact that they may function after his creative process is often purely accidental. In fact in many ways he is rejecting utility to bring furniture back into the realm of aesthetic beauty. By creating pieces of furniture, he is immediately triggering the idea of function in our minds. As we have become so accustomed to functional furniture, we associate recognisable shapes with functions. Sometimes Snyder does not see it necessary to incorporate function in this way. By doing this, he is proving the point that art, beauty and function can go hand in hand. His furniture possesses the alternative and much overlooked, thought provoking and spiritual qualities that furniture can possess. In non-industrial countries and in non-industrial times, these have been qualities which are as evident as utility.

Functionability, which we have all become familiar with, is at its clearest in today's standard kitchen with cupboards and presses to contain tables to eat from and chairs to sit upon.(fig. 2). Comparing these items of furniture in this context, to Snyder's creations, the huge difference is made clear.

Snyder insists that his cabinets, one of which is entitled Spirit of the Afterfire (fig. 3), although being highly sculptural in form and production technique, are still functional. However if his pieces of storage were used for the purpose of containing as we know it they would most certainly infuriate the owner.

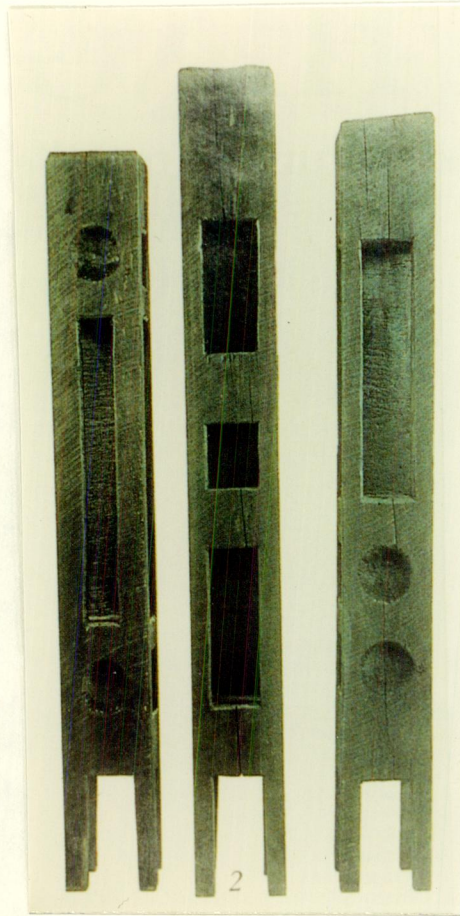


Figure (3); Spirit of the Afterfire, Richard Snyder. -1988

In contrast, the designing of a kitchen undergoes serious design processes for its usability. As kitchens would be used for storing things such as food and utensils, as well as for cooking, eating or sitting, the design of the equipment within it must make these as easy as possible. In terms of simplicity, comfort, practicality, usefulness, visual ease, attractiveness and common sense, objects must be designed in proportion to the proper scale, using practical materials, and very importantly, must be light and easy to assemble and transport. They must be cheap to make and profitable and so are subjected to the restrictions of the machine.

Snyder's cabinets, firstly are not very practical in terms of storage space. In a kitchen the aforementioned cabinet would most probably function best for containing small amounts of food. However, the actual storage space is quite small, irregularly shaped and in comparison to the actual amount of space which it consists of, would be most unsuitable as a container. They are almost seven feet in height, yet the amount of actual storage space is proportionally very small. The aim of kitchen storage space is to enclose as much as possible in a minimum amount of space. To aid this, designers have incorporated a series of devices to make storage easier. Kitchens are usually now built into the walls, lines of cupboards fit easily together and in corners they have been fitted with carousel shelving to contain more and to waste as little space as possible. Adjustable shelves, various drawers and lightweight materials have been considered in a complex design process. Snyder doesn't pay any attention to these aspects, although he insists they are for storage. In terms of hygiene, the fact that they have no actual cover, and are merely spaces enclosed by a frame would make food inside, or other items susceptible to dust and dirt. He is playing around with sculptural space. These cabinets enclose space for his conceptual purposes, and the fact that even underneath there is a huge waste of space in functional terms, is irrelevant. Snyder is pushing the idea of storage and form as far as it can possibly go.

They are made from wood and painted, which would make cleaning a much more difficult and damaging process than if they were plastic coated which much of today's cupboard insides are.

He has used wood for other more personal reasons. His use of material is rough and heavily cut. He uses large blocks of wood with

heavy, stable legs and indeed forms, however, in these cabinets there is an illusion of lightness by the fact that they are completely hollow and have been cut away in parts to expose the contents which could be placed inside. Kitchens today and the cupboards which are built within them, are, by contrast, structured in a light chipboard, however, it is most important for them to look stable and heavy, so designers try to create this illusion by covering with alternative materials.

Snyder uses materials in his furniture not for practical purposes but for sculptural ones. Rather than take inspiration from machines like so many today do, he has used the values and techniques of other cultures to allow us to see the cabinet as it once was, mysterious, magical, beautiful and decorative. The sheer functional aspect of the designing of storage in today's society further illustrated in the recent practise of measuring people for their kitchen. Workspaces, drawers, cupboards and shelving can in this way be pre-designed accordingly. Snyder pays no attention to versatility in this way. He is versatile in the fact that he creates extremely desirable objects as sculptural statements, but as an artist he has full power over what is made and the factors which influence him come from within.

He is using the cabinet as a starting point to convey the message that what we consider today to be pieces of equipment can be pieces of art. These cabinets exist to fulfil other functions more profound and often neglected needs within us. To see what we recognise as storage appearing in such sculptural forms indeed fulfils the artist's need to bridge the gap between function and art. By injecting an artistic creative approach to the production of furniture he is bringing the preconceived value of furniture a stage higher and in bringing the idea of art into a functional item, is dispelling the popular notion that furniture is something you walk into while standing back to look at a painting.

So to say that Snyder's furniture is not functional would most certainly be wrong. It would be however, quite understandable given the circumstances under which most people have come into contact with furniture throughout their lives. His creations are furniture, but they are also art; they function as art in the shape of furniture. In the 1970's, Snyder paid his way through college by producing sleek, functional, highly finished storage pieces. As a result he realised how, through the

new styles which the modern movement brought on in the 1920's, that pieces of furniture had become anonymous instruments. Until about 1984 he was producing cabinets (fig. 4), with clean lines, primary colours and a technically perfect finish, which all owe credit to modernist thinking and their rules for living. Through these rules, forms of objects became indistinguishable from their functions and their sole reason for existence was to be used as pieces of equipment. The furniture he was making in their forms and their meaning, struck him as being no more exciting than a machine produced utensil. 'I began working in this direction in reaction to some of the more highly technical aspects of my work.' Snyder is in his work, attempting to give his furniture "a certain purity, unachievable through a design process"(2).

This certain purity is the result he achieves through including his notions of function into furniture - sculptural functions, visual beauty and excitement. Decoration, imagery, magic, concept and presence, make his work function as a form of fantasy and escape.

By neglecting a design process in favour of a conceptual creative individualistic approach to his work, he is dispelling preconceived notions of function, and putting in its place what he considers to be a much forgotten set of functions.

References;

- (1)BENTON, 1975, p. 133.
- (2)SNYDER,1990,Interview.

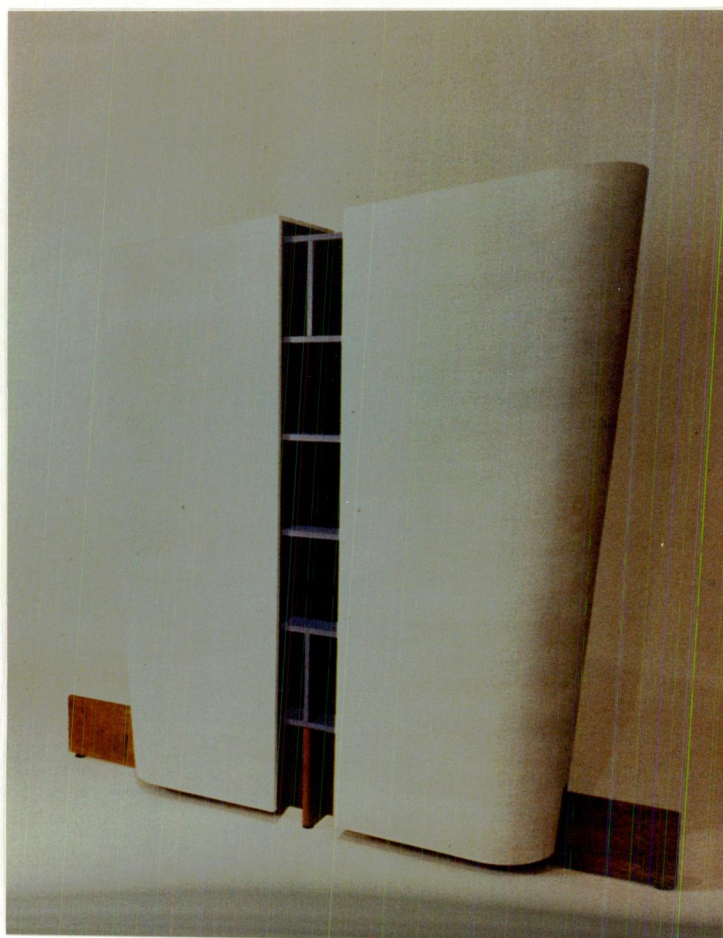


Figure (4); An early Snyder cabinet.

CHAPTER 2:

The alternative idea of furniture;

(A): The Restrictions of Industrial Design and Manufacture.

Visual beauty, sculptural qualities, symbolism, magic, fantasy and escape have been strong elements of furniture since the beginning of time. It was only when machine technology advanced to such high degrees, and began supplying the masses with the latest styles and trends, that the fabrication of furniture became a mere design process. Furniture became a rationalised products of that process. As new processes and techniques were discovered, and forms produced from that technique, preceding forms were immediately considered outdated. The idea has formed since the early 20th Century and is in its prime today, that it is the aesthetic ideal of our furniture manufacturers to increase the usefulness of an object. This in turn however, helps to decrease its presence. Forms which have been simplified for their function and the function itself became the formula.

The beauty of industrial design is conceptual in nature; if it expressed anything at all, it is the precise accuracy of a formula. It is the sign of a function. Its rationality confines it to one, and only one alternative: either an object will work or it won't. In the second case it must be thrown into the trash barrel. It is not simply usefulness that makes the handcrafted object so captivating. It lives in intimate connivance with our senses and that is why it is so difficult to part company with it. It is like throwing an old friend out into the street.(1)

Objects made by hand enter into the senses. They have a physical presence, as maximum utility is continually violated in favour of tradition and imagination. Imagination and creativity can be produced by the machine process, however, in most cases, these qualities are marred by a substantial amount of outside influence particularly from the consumer. This is why, year after year, at furniture exhibition such as that at Milan, forms appear as ever, in perhaps varying forms, but without going beyond the potential of machine production, or which show much ingenuity or excitement.

The 1990 Milan furniture fair was indicative of this. The furniture exhibited showed that:

a stylish restraint that has dominated the show for the last couple of years was very much in evidence, with comfort, colour and classic design taking precedence over true innovation.(2).

This restraint which existed here surely cannot be the result of any lack of creativity on a designer's or design team's part. Manufacturers of furniture exhibit greatly at the Milan fair and obviously the reason is trade and business. Perhaps restraint in creative forms is due to a fear of business failure. Designers stick to faithful popular designs and materials to ensure full sales potential at the lowest possible production price. Reproduction ladder-back Mackintosh chairs, (fig. 5) from the 1920's, were even on display. So, if these factors are the reasons for the design of our furniture today, how can any considered luxury, artistic elements be brought into our homes? It is only possible through the artist or craftsman who produces furniture as craftwork and whose sole aim is not to make huge profits, increase sales, satisfy function or supply a demand.

And before the huge profit making tools which are machinery, technology and the industrial plant, were craftspeople and once again their furniture is re-emerging.

The industrial object allows the superfluous no place, craftwork delights in decoration. Its predilection for ornamentation is a violation of the principle of efficiency. The decorative patterns of the handcrafted object generally have no functions whatsoever; hence they are ruthlessly eliminated by the industrial designer. The persistence and the proliferation of purely decorative motifs in craftwork reveal to us an intermediate zone between usefulness and aesthetic contemplation.(3)

Decorative qualities, whether for sheer visual impact or for conceptual purposes are often pointless in the manufacture of similar goods. Some would argue that industrially produced goods can be works of art, but, surely the absence of an artist's full creativity and imagination, would render industrial designed and made products, to a large degree

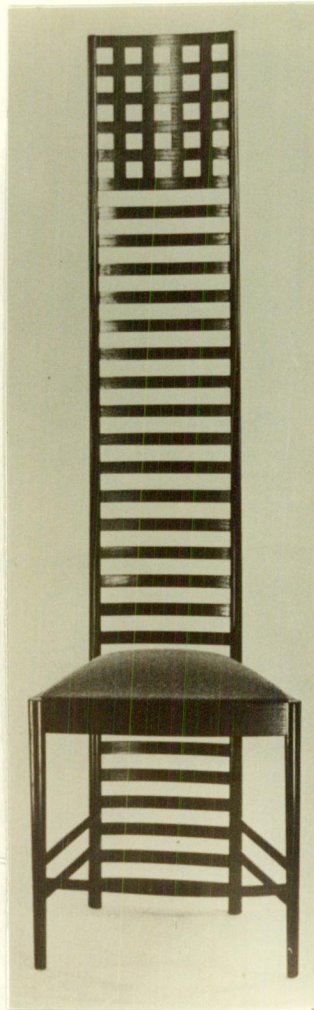


Figure (5); Mackintosh Ladderback chair.

influenced by outside force. This is a point on which many art and design critics differ. One writer however comments:

In capitalist society, the primary purpose of the manufacture of artefacts, a process of which design is a part, has to be to make a profit for the manufacturer. Whatever degree of artistic imagination is lavished upon the design of objects, it is done not to give expression to the designers creativity and imagination, but to make the products saleable and profitable. Calling Industrial Design 'Art' suggest the designers occupy the principle role in production.(4).

The important utility of art is to provide expression of ideas, imagination and ingenuity in the utmost of freedom - completely free of constraints to the individual's expression. And this is why artists such as Richard Snyder are not designing for industry. Although capable of creating designs for production, this process would curb any freedom of self-expression in concept or decorative qualities. For Snyder, the only way in which to make furniture which is expressive and symbolic, is through the work of his mind and hands. In doing so, he is endowing a now highly industrialised product with real symbolic beauty. To him, use and beauty should go hand in hand; furniture can be art.

(B): Art and Function in Non-Industrialised Countries: Ritual.

Art and use, have been a forbidden combination under the rules of western art, and especially since the rise in technology and the imposing rules of the 'function ideal'. What existed before the concept of furniture as function, before the emergence of deadly serious sitting machines, sleeping machines, and before French modernist godfather Le Corbusier declared the house as a machine for living in, was a furniture of wit, irony, imagination, symbolism and fantasy. In the 1900's before houses became dominated by the presence of bland, colourless chrome tubes, leather cushions, metal, plywood and plastic, was wonderfully carved exotic woods and gold leaf. In primitive cultures even now, where words such as design process, production line, assembly line, industrial design or enterprise are meaningless, furniture is a fantastically symbolic, decorative juxtaposition of beauty and function. Precious stones, antler, horn, wood, shells and paint all further the craftsman's portrayal of a useful symbolic object. The 1970's and 1980's have seen the re-emergence of the colour and exotic images and patterns of Asia, Africa and South America. It is evident in the furniture of Richard Snyder. He sees the attitude which non-western cultures have to are and utility as completely fresh and untouched by our western attitude to art.

In the west we see functional items as having a much lower value in the hierarchy of aesthetic values but in countries of Africa, items of furniture such as a chieftan's stool or a storage box are symbolic ritualistic objects, highly decorative handcrafted forms and functional items. There is no difference. Art can be expressed in all kinds of utilitarian objects, and that expression is in no way inferior to 'pure sculpture'. This is based on an animistic religious belief system, where objects are endowed with a magical power or contain a spirit for particular reasons. When someone dies, their spirit is immediately transferred into an object, so that object takes on a more significant role than pure function. It is this belief in spirits, and the presence they create in objects which attracted Richard Snyder. As he was seeking out traditional forms outside the west, in a negation of western values, the archaic quality of craftsmanship, the value of functional objects, and the antiquity of the objects he saw, stood for values he found were lost in the rapidly progressing western society. During travels to Africa, the Middle East, India and south east Asia, he

became fascinated with the skills and spiritual beliefs of the people he encountered. From this, he began working on a collection of cabinets and furniture items which he called 'Spirithouses'. Each one has its own story or narrative but is based around the idea of containing a spirit rather than objects which we might use cabinets for. He is, through this, bringing a fantasy into furniture, which we, the users, can involve ourselves in. Each spirithouse contains a fantasy presence or is endowed with a magical power to perform a certain task when objects are placed inside. The idea is an imaginary one, where each spirithouse was rubbed with spirit repellent that would confuse the spirits. Inside you could put objects that you wanted the spirits to keep away from.

Like miniature temples, they confer a sacred value to their contents and surroundings. One type of cabinet in his spirit house range is called 'They spoke a language we could not understand'(fig. 6). Their shapes are similar to what one would expect to stumble across in a jungle, as some sort of totem-like constructions. With this spirit house, the small hole in the centre contains hay, and Snyder has placed a recording of bird sounds which suggests some birds inside. This is Snyder's only real acceptance of technology. He uses technology such as sound recordings and projected lights or images only to further our "entering of a fantasy with all our senses and with our minds.(5).

The thought of a coneshaped container full of birds fleeing in fear and seeking protection from evil spirits to us, seems humorous. Snyder comments:

In Africa and Asia I was exposed to animist religion and the spirit world. Humour was my first reaction to this intense concern with omens and spirits, controlling the lives of primitive peoples. But I began to see how much this thinking was my thinking; how I believe in the spirit that lives under the mud in the river and how the tree in the centre of the forest with the split trunk holds a special meaning. We don't act on our superstitions as seriously, but we don't negate them either - just in case.(6)

In the west, religion is not so huge a driving force and doesn't manifest itself in the same way as animist religions. To us the rituals involved in religion are routine encounters. Our lives revolve around the



Figure (6); They spoke a language we could not understand, Richard Snyder. -1988.



Figure (7); Moonlisteners, Richard Snyder.- 1988.

much more materialistic values, which we have created for ourselves. To us, furniture is a novelty with a fantasy function, and to involve ourselves with that fantasy of primitive superstitions and magic is a temporary escape - an exciting mysterious ritual so different from the uses we would normally give cabinets.

Moonlistners (fig. 7) is another example of a spirit house. Into them can be put special objects which are kept safe, in the tribal significance, by the moon.

By placing objects into fertility cabinets, (fig. 8) the children of whoever partakes in the fantasy, are born with different qualities. The priestess fertility cabinet suggests high rank and authority.

Snyder's furniture is then encouraging people to create their own stories and fantasies with his furniture. In doing so, people can see the cabinet as a secret magical object full of magical possibilities. Using his imagination and the idea of containing, he is bringing new novelty uses into furniture. The container, or the idea of containing, can indeed be an imaginative process as we find our own special places for objects. All our possessions have their own history which tells of a certain time or place. People often find it difficult to part with their acquired possessions placing them in their own position on a shelf, or in a drawer or cupboard depending on their value. For small items we want to keep for practical purposes, we find storage in our pockets. For more valuable objects, we find homes in the interior in an organised way. To open a drawer after a certain period of time and find objects there, objects which once were very basic things, one can view some time later as symbolic of events, as with time, our perception and their significance changes.

Storage space is thus an ideal metaphor to be used by artists, and even writers such as C.S. Lewis in The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, perceives the wardrobe as a doorway into a magical kingdom, Narnia. Pandora's Box is also symbolic storage space for bats significant of the world's evil.

Artists like Joseph Cornell have used the box as a container for objects telling a history or an epic in a symbolic way. Richard Snyder has

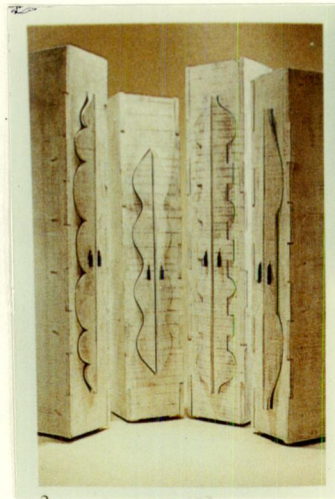
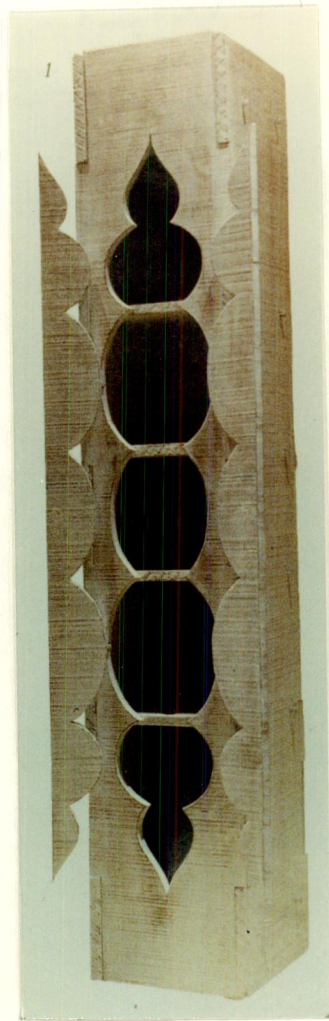


Figure (8); Fertility cabinets, Richard Snyder. -1988.

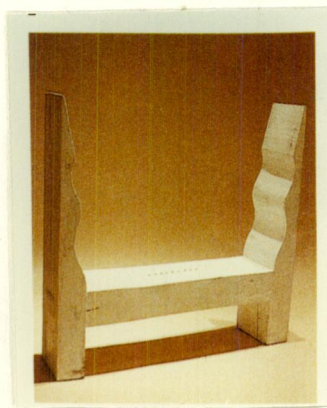


Figure (9); Secret Telling bench, Richard Snyder. -1989.

chosen to create the object and started the ritual for us with a story. The objects we place inside and the function we discover in this, is up to our imagination.

Snyder also makes tables, benches and chairs. The throne or chair can, in the same way as the box or cabinet, be used in a fantasy way. Chairs, what we sit upon to eat or talk or simply rest, can be used as a metaphor for power, authority or rank. Celebrating the symbolic significance of these banal everyday happenings. The bench in figure 9 has been called secret telling bench. Creating a seat for simply telling somebody something makes this act into something more interesting with some amount of magic.

It is this certain magical significance which is found in tribal objects: the chieftan's stool, the container, fetishes, symbolically containing bones and hair, which is not found in western functional objects. And our rational functional attitude to furniture doesn't allow for imaginative ritualistic or fantasy elements to come into our relationship with those objects. Tribal culture, although it has been influenced, to some degree by the developments of the west, retains some of its values, the simplicity and beauty of which artists find intriguing. For the artistic craftsman it is a way of preserving standards which could all too easily be lost, as functionalism manifests itself in purpose built kitchens and bathrooms. Interiors have become dead with modern pieces of equipment. Disposable pens, lighters and cameras are used until they no longer function then are disposed of. This is the value of much of our consumer items. Furniture such as that of Snyder or that of tribal Africa or the Amazon on the other hand allows both the object for storage a valuable, spiritual significance and furniture such as storage, chairs and tables become reminders of how important these objects were in many ways before the consumer was consumed.

(C): Eclecticism in Pre-Industrial (and Snyder's) Furniture:

Eclecticism through historical themes and times has always been a strong inspiration for the crafts and art. Just why so many people in creative fields look to past history and artefacts is an indication of the times - a dissatisfaction with the present, and a fear of the future. It is a way of expressing admiration for the past - its events and its values. Pre-industrial society and its idea of furniture and art can in many ways be compared to today. As, much of our furniture today created by the artistic craftsman appears in very innovative forms, and with almost eighty years of furniture history of a much different nature behind it, it is inevitable that forms and concepts are different. However, one thing remains the same, and that is source material. Furniture appears today, not only in the truly modern functional style, but there are also appears to be amongst craftsmen a Victorian revival style and amongst artists a Victorian inspiration revival - a revival of their inspiration and values. Whether adapted in a very literal reproduction furniture or new forms created - one thing is certain, the gothic, the oriental, the exotic eastern style is appearing again in our interiors as a new rejection of modernism and the machine.

In the creation of Victorian furniture a 19th century grammar of decorative ornament evolved as past civilisations were scoured for their most fanciful imagery. Rooms of Victorian houses become cluttered with tables, chairs, mirrors, stools, cabinets, screens and ornaments, bearing reference to an extraordinary eclectic range of cultural and aesthetic notions and ideals. The hard lines, and religious rules and regulations of modernist thinking, their rationalisation of design for machine production, were not a preoccupation, and forms were created through the craftsman's research, gathering and examination of world wide styles - there were no limits. Today we have seen and heard the modernist teachings and many have decided to reject it for what was before, to again live amongst lavishly decorated furniture - to trade in function and practicality for a form of escape through the past. What is now more important to many, is what furniture says about our attitude to the future and how, through the exotic, we are not only saying something about our wealth and culture but about our need for our furniture, as well as our painting and sculpture to be more than just functional.

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of the problem of the existence of a solution of the system of equations (1) for arbitrary values of the parameters α and β . It is shown that the system has a solution for arbitrary values of the parameters α and β if and only if the condition $\alpha + \beta = 1$ is satisfied. This condition is also necessary for the existence of a solution of the system of equations (1) for arbitrary values of the parameters α and β .

2. In the second part of the paper the problem of the existence of a solution of the system of equations (1) for arbitrary values of the parameters α and β is solved. It is shown that the system has a solution for arbitrary values of the parameters α and β if and only if the condition $\alpha + \beta = 1$ is satisfied. This condition is also necessary for the existence of a solution of the system of equations (1) for arbitrary values of the parameters α and β .

3. In the third part of the paper the problem of the existence of a solution of the system of equations (1) for arbitrary values of the parameters α and β is solved. It is shown that the system has a solution for arbitrary values of the parameters α and β if and only if the condition $\alpha + \beta = 1$ is satisfied. This condition is also necessary for the existence of a solution of the system of equations (1) for arbitrary values of the parameters α and β .

On studying issues in interiors, magazines and periodicals, this point is made clear. The World of Interiors is what might be considered the interior design version of Vogue, and is intended as a source book of the latest fashions and trends for conscientious home owners. The articles in the latest issue - February 1991 - reflect much of the new move towards the past. Advertisements in the magazine, which take up almost half of the issue, consists of pictures of 19th century Oriental rugs, Russian fabrics, Sotheby's fine arts, reproduction rococo cornices and carved mahogany furniture. The articles themselves, of which there are about twenty, consist of a series of articles and reports on Edwardian revival houses, renovating in the Victorian style and decorative antique style furniture. What is most interesting is that only one article in any way bears reference to the type of interior which is indicative of the 20th century's development, and this is a building converted in which an orchestra were to rehearse music. For the house, it appears that, for many there is something much more appealing in the old style. Yet again, we seem to be finding our escape in furniture of a Victorian revival style. In this way, we are witnessing the decoration, luxury and flamboyancy of the Victorian age, complete with high quality fabric, ornaments and semi-handcrafted reproduction furniture. These are the products which craftsmen are now producing to a very high standard of craftsmanship, to fulfil people's need for quality furniture, which replaces the present for the past.

Using the past as equal inspiration, artists have now taken the role of craftsman on hand, to produce their own unique adaptation of the same sources as the Victorian craftsmen. Instead of reproducing the stylized mahogany chairs and dressers of the 19th century they are - like in some Victorian craftsmen's unique furniture - creating original and completely innovative pieces of furniture, which can be compared to pieces of art.

Richard Snyder's furniture takes its inspiration not only from the objects of tribal culture. He sees too, the ability which historical stories and ideas have, to release modern day furniture from the constraints of function. Learning from Victorian furniture that the art history and general history of civilizations can allow for both decorative, architectural foreign elements, as well as the wealth of imaginative concepts involved with the culture and superstitions of those civilizations, he has brought again an imaginative element into furniture. Again, through his collection called

Collectables and Curiosities, we the user, partake in the magical rituals and way of life of the far east, northern Africa and the orient. This furniture tells stories of daydreams set in exotic and imaginary places. They begin in the remote palaces of Sultans and Kings in journeys to Emperor's estates filled with strange and curious objects. Like much Victorian furniture its source is in other civilizations. Victorians took decorative elements and imagery but Snyder, along with these, creates a concept. As furniture of the Victorian period looked to styles which best leant to the need for ornament and styles which had the best potential for ordered regular decoration and pattern and the exotic, Richard Snyder further involves us with the cultures of other civilizations by also bringing an element of art in. As highly idealized paintings in the 1900's told stories of other lands in idealistic representations of history, Snyder has told these stories in furniture.

One can imagine a room full of Snyder's collectables and curiosities having the same presence as one English critic's description of a Victorian interior as a 'toy shop in action':

every room is in masquerade, the salon Chinese, full of jars and mandarins and pagodas, the library Egyptian, all covered with hieroglyphics and swarming with furniture crocodiles and sphinxes. Only think of a crocodile couch or a sphinx sofa. They sleep in Turkish tents and dine in a gothic chapel. How English ladies and gentlemen in their everyday attire look exceedingly out of place in such mummery.(7).

Cabinet of the people who got lost (fig. 10) tells of something most definitely not Western. In appearance it is rustic and has a certain element of antiquity. It is solely the decoration which would give a viewer the idea of another culture, without the knowledge of an artist's concept. The five people depicted on each door are the faces of the sons and daughters of world leaders who were on a pilgrimage for peace in the fictitious Mountain of God. Their mysterious disappearance in Snyder's story led to the fabrication of this cabinet as a memorial. Nothing has or is ever to be placed inside any of the five storage sections in the hope that The Lost People might someday return. The people depicted suggest people from other places and in a modern interior this cabinet would serve in much the



Figure (10); Cabinet of the people who got lost, Richard Snyder. -1989.

same way as Egyptian sphinxes, or a table with carved wooden mythological animals would have, in an interior from the Victorian era.

Gift from the King of Nubia (fig. 11) is, according to Snyder, a gift given to a sultan who had saved her son from mistakenly entering the cave of 1,000 perils, while on a journey to the Sultan's lands. Its shape is suggestive of eastern lands, as is the decorative thickly painted tan and white stripes. This is a very precious and valuable cabinet and its safekeeping is guaranteed.

Cabinet of the ancient squid (fig.11) is based in the orient where the evil emperor of Cathay - Min Cho, was the original possessor. According to the artist 'Inside were placed, objects too horrible to mention, which were obtained from conquered enemy leaders.'"(8).

These items of furniture are 20th Century 'collectables'. In the same way as pre-twentieth century people wanted to own highly original pieces of exotic furniture, people today are finding that the same elements give the interior a touch of the past. Rather than taking tribal possessions, some artists are bringing it's aura into the West through furniture. With Snyder's furniture, there is the added bonus of something magical or humorous. Depending on our perception, whatever way we perceive it, it is most definitely not the result of some design process in which utility is the prime preoccupation of the maker. These have functions long forgotten in furniture. Something as socially vital as furniture, is appearing once again in a style of amusement, wit and dreamlike fantasy. Just as the Victorians, being well educated in the liberal arts and the classics, became fascinated when they saw the legs of a table which had marched out of the pages of a 14th century manuscript, we are, through furniture, becoming more and more attached to the past.

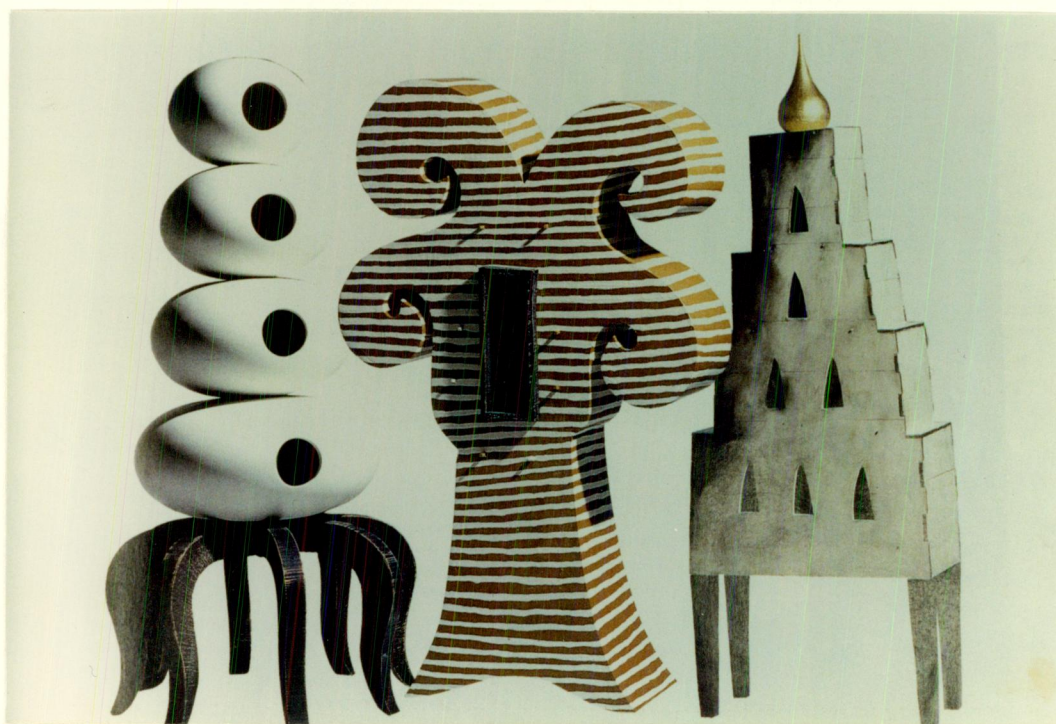


Figure (11); Cabinet of the ancient squid,
Gift from the King of Nubia,
Cabinet of the seven Mosques., Richard Snyder. -1989.

(D); Snyder and Bugatti-1980 and 1880.

In terms of eclectic form and decoration, a comparison can be drawn up between the Victorian craftsman from Italy - Carlo Bugatti and Richard Snyder. Bugatti's furniture borrows from all over the world. Chinese, Japanese, Greek, Persian, Byzantine and African - there are elements of each. The first thing to note is that Carlo Bugatti was born in 1856 and most of his furniture was made just before 1900 and shortly afterwards, and when one considers the ideas and attitudes he had to furniture, the parallel is made clear.

Carlo Bugatti's creations were in truth absolutely useless - or unusable. What is more vain than a leather wallet without stitching? And what is one to do with a sulky, normally intended trotting races which only has one wheel? These examples are most clearly eloquent. There is also a curious chair which bends to your will. You are sitting before a ravishing writing desk, and the whine strikes you to turn your back to it. All you need to do is lean hard against the chair's back, without moving it an inch and it gives you a new perspective. The wood creaks, and if you amuse yourself by moving it back and forth two, three or four times, will it support the strain?. But what does it matter?. It is enough that the thing exists. It is also the thing and its opposite, the thing which looks at itself and one can say makes fun of itself. (9).

What is evident in both Bugatti's furniture and in Snyder's is the need for both artists' furniture to exist on its own terms. Bugatti's furniture itself cannot be compared to much Victorian furniture, however it is an indication of many craftsmen's attitudes to furniture at that time, their love of the exotic, their blending of history of art, embodying itself in some fantastic form which is scarcely believable. His work was undeniably a fantasy, an artist's perception of the exotic, nourished by his love of international exhibitions and natural history books (10). The fact that it was unusable or unsuitable for much use was unimportant.

A desk, made by Bugatti, is show in figure 12. In appearance it is almost like an adaptation of a temple or mosque for a piece of furniture. It is clearly Islamic in influence with its arches, columns and pattern. Such attention to form and decoration is virtually never found in much of our

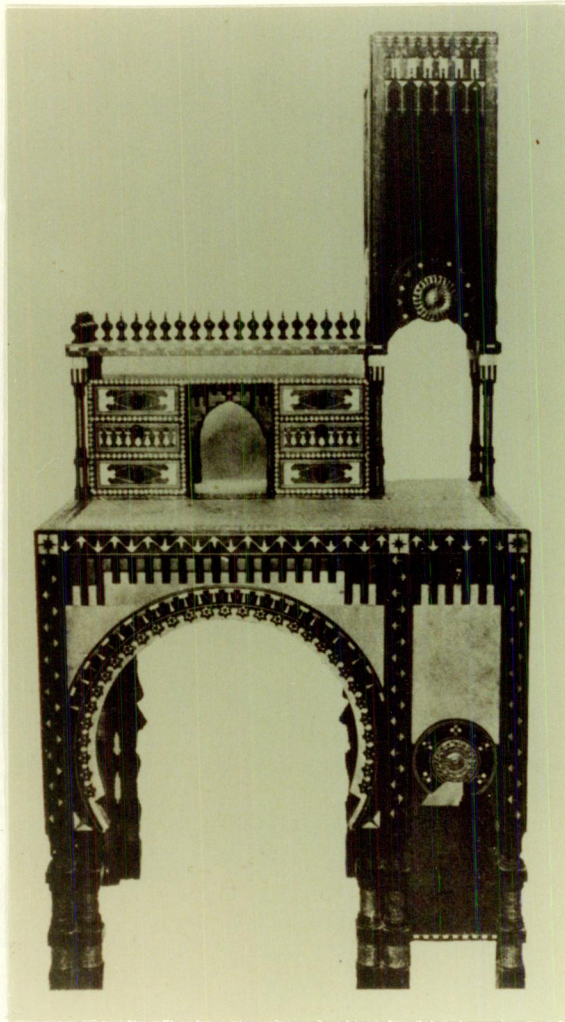


Figure (12); Bugatti desk, circa 1900.

utilitarian furniture today. Like Snyder, he is concerned with form and impact rather than use. Snyder's Cabinet of the seven mosques (fig. 11) would probably be the best to compare with Bugatti's idea. Snyder has added, as an artist, an idea where each window, in his adaptation of the Islamic style of architecture, leads into a separate prayer room which contains a speaker playing different prayer sounds. It is a homage to Allah and seven of the world's most renowned prayer callers, each from one of the seven great mosques of the world.

Snyder's work, his curious and fascinating cabinets, tables and chairs fitted into a room, would provide the owner in pursuit of some dreamlike interior to live an imaginary ritualistic fantasy. Bugatti's would do so in a visual way where owners could pride in the associations which the exotic has with wealth and status. With Snyder, the person in possession of an interior containing his furniture can also take part in the artist's creativity and can perceive the furniture as a more extreme escape route. By directly interacting with the fantasies he has created, people can become more in touch with the artist's aim. Nevertheless, both artists' and craftsman's' furniture fulfil a fantasy function.

The fantasy element of Bugatti's furniture is epitomised in the bedroom which he designed for Lord Battersea at the beginning of this century.(fig.13) The headboard and canopy were designed to resemble an Arabic grotto. Lord Battersea could, as was desired by so many people, sleep in an imitation palace with reference to exotic lands. Situated in the middle of thriving London, to walk into a room such as this would seem to be akin to stepping into some sort of fantasy world in which one could dream and delight in his possessions.

This leads to the unfortunate recognition that alike all the wonderfully exciting furniture of artists and craftsmen today, fantasy furniture was the sole property of those who needed it least. Western culture has always required privilege, rank and wealth to allow people to flee life's hardships and realities in the creation of fantasy environments. The art furniture today, in a way, suffers because it does not present itself in many furniture stores or showrooms. Instead, it appears in galleries such as in New York, Art et Industrie, The Nancy Hoffman Gallery or the Max Protech Gallery and in England in art furniture galleries such as



Figure (13); Lord Battersea's bedroom-Designed by Bugatti. -1900.

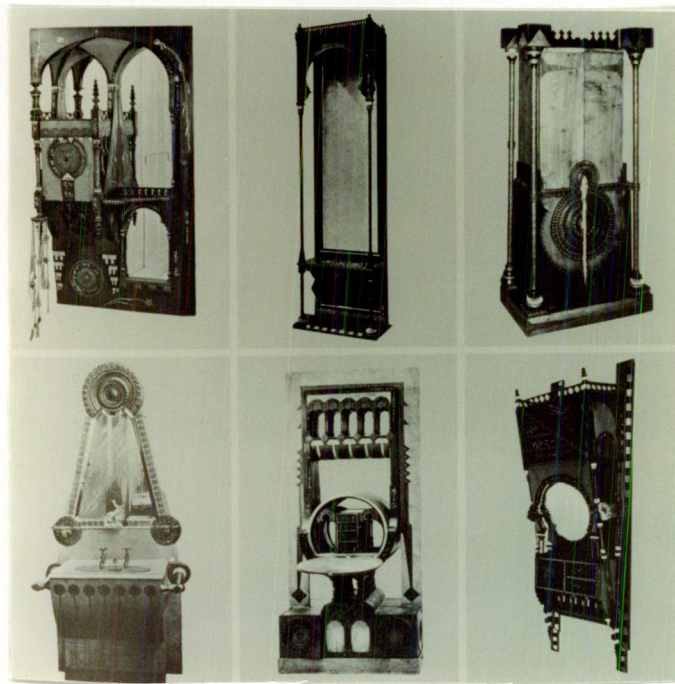


Figure (14); Various items of Bugatti furniture.

Crucial, One Off (owned by furniture maker, Ron Arad), Monolith and Faell. Nevertheless, gallery owners such as Rick Kaufmann of Art et Industrie are concerned with the same aims as the art furniture designers themselves, and are careful not to allow the furniture to become so precious that it might not fulfil its objectives or fail to reach as large a public as it deserves. According to Kaufmann:

The furniture is less expensive than a Rauschenberg, but more expensive than a Barcalounger - a ubiquitous type of suburban American easy chair with a back which declines simultaneously with a pop-up footrest.(11)

Expense apart, however, the most important issue is that fantasy has been born again through the work of these artists such as Snyder and the galleries which house their work. The exotic and other cultural elements can again, be present in our furniture and available to us.

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CONCLUSION:

Function and art are once again being allowed to exist side by side in our furniture. Through the work of the new breed of furniture artist, an idea or emotion can be conveyed through an ingenious and innovative art process. These artists, Richard Snyder being a prime example, feel that beauty, humour and excitement has been, over the last century, taken from our everyday context, and been embodied in the painting or the sculpture. The rekindling of the artistry, the reclaiming of the function which furniture can possess and the nourishing of our most profoundly human aspects, seemed inevitable.

In this reclamation process, the aesthetic self consciousness of twentieth century modernism, which drew furniture into geometric and simplified shapes and forms, has been rejected and considered an inevitable period in the history of furniture, but highly neglecting in its utilitarian products. Artists and craftsmen are now, in the late twentieth century, going back to their roots.

These roots are embodied in the work of tribal "primitive" man where instinctive creativity is injected into everyday life, through, not only sculpture, drawing, ritual and religion but through functional pieces of furniture. Inspiring and highly humanising, it can, through the artist, be adapted and brought back into our lives. Even in the West, before we were subjected to the capitalist entrepreneur and production plants supplying us with functional equipment, furniture could amuse us, in its fantastic forms, and actually make us think, wonder and dream. The machine aesthetic robbed us of this, with its organised way of thinking and acting.

But now, through the values of non-industrial societies and pre-industrial times, artists of today are liberating us from our habitual responses and shattering our expectations of function. By bringing art, fantasy and magic into today's furniture, artists are addressing the deprivations of society, and bringing it directly into our living rooms. Through furniture such as Richard Snyder's, life no longer has to be lived according to the hard hitting rules and regulations of the modernist movement.

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